Mental Health in Cities:
Beyond traditional healthcare services

December 2024

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About this study

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Publication Date: December 2024

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1. Key messages

Building on the clear evidence from our findings, there is an urgent need for decisive action to address the growing mental health crisis across Europe. Cities are on the frontlines of this challenge, addressing increased demand for mental health services, rising socioeconomic inequalities, and the lasting impacts of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. We call on the EU institutions and national governments to prioritise mental health through the following policy recommendations, ensuring that cities are empowered as key actors in delivering health and well-being solutions.

Recognise cities as key actors in mental health policies

National governments and the EU institutions should formally recognise cities as key partners in addressing mental health challenges. Cities, with their direct connection to residents, are uniquely positioned to implement targeted mental health interventions that address local needs, providing alternative treatments and solutions when national mental health services are overburdened or inaccessible.

Develop comprehensive national mental health strategies

National governments should establish inclusive mental health strategies that address the unique needs of urban populations. Cities must be integral partners in the co-creation, implementation and evaluation of these strategies, ensuring that local issues are addressed within a broader national framework.

Integrate mental health in the European Pillar of Social Rights

Mental health should be firmly anchored across all relevant principles of the new Action Plan for the EPSR. Extending beyond Principle 16, mental health is linked to policies on social protection, employment, and essential services, addressing its links to socioeconomic factors like job security, housing and inequality.

Increase EU funding for local mental health initiatives

The European Commission should allocate more resources from programmes like ESF+, Horizon Europe and EU4Health to strengthen cities' ability to deliver mental health services and social services at the local level. These funds should be directed towards prevention, research and infrastructure improvements that enhance mental health outcomes across cities.

Strengthen data collection and research

Cities should be supported in collecting comprehensive data on mental health outcomes and services, as well as on the impact of environmental factors, urban environment and planning decisions on the mental health of urban dwellers. Reliable data is essential for informed decision-making and effective policy design. Establishing indicators and monitoring frameworks will help evaluate mental health programmes implemented at city level.

Ensure mental health standards in public procurement contracts

The EU should expand the Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) framework to include mental health as one of the criteria. Cities recommend that public procurement contracts mandate fair and supportive working conditions, including mental health provisions for employees, ensuring workplace environments that prioritise wellbeing across sectors.

Support capacity-building of local governments

The EU should invest in targeted funding and training for local authorities, healthcare providers and community organisations to strengthen their ability to address mental health challenges at the local level. This includes building expertise in digital mental health solutions, early intervention strategies, and mental health promotion within city administrations.

2. Executive summary

Mental health has emerged as one of the major concerns across Europe, with rising rates of stress, anxiety and depression, particularly among vulnerable groups such as young people, low-income residents, the elderly and migrants. Urban environments, characterised by density, diversity and complex living conditions, bring both risks and opportunities in addressing mental health. With their proximity to citizens and local expertise, cities are uniquely positioned to shape interventions that address the mental health risks including not only healthcare needs but also the primary social, economic and environmental factors that contribute to poor mental health.

This report is part of a Eurocities series on the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), with a focus on mental health (Principle 16: Access to Health). It highlights how cities are creating policies and services that not only target mental health but also address the social factors, such as housing, employment and social inclusion, that have a big impact on citizens' wellbeing. The report underlines the need for a city-wide approach, where mental health is integrated in all areas of urban policy, from transport and urban design to culture, environment and social services.

As mental health disorders now affect around 84 million people in the EU, costing more than €600 billion per year (European Commission, 2018), it is clear that cities cannot tackle this issue in isolation. The report identifies critical gaps in funding, coordination and data collection, which limit the effectiveness of city-level interventions. It also stresses the need for enhanced cooperation between cities, national governments and EU institutions to build a more resilient mental health infrastructure that addresses both acute needs and long-term prevention.

Key findings:

- The October 2023 Eurobarometer report highlighted that nearly half (46%) of people in the EU reported experiencing emotional or psychosocial issues, such as depression or anxiety, within the past 12 months.

- While healthcare is primarily a national responsibility, cities play an important role in addressing everyday mental health risk factors, such as poverty, social isolation and financial or housing insecurity.

- Cities are uniquely positioned to develop integrated, place-based solutions that directly tackle these risk factors and actively promote mental wellbeing. They can provide alternative treatments and fill gaps often caused by inaccessible and under-resourced national mental health services.

- Coordinated involvement of multiple city departments is needed. Mental health is linked with various city services and sectors, including social care, education, housing, culture and urban design. Green spaces, accessible transport and safe public areas all contribute to reducing anxiety and stress.

- Cities face significant barriers in addressing mental health, ranging from limited statutory competences, financial resources, human capacity shortages and gaps in data, which are limiting the effectiveness of local measures.

- Cities successfully pioneer mental health interventions, often going beyond their remit. These include the implementation of municipal strategies, collaboration with local partners, community engagement and innovative service delivery approaches to promote the wellbeing and mental health of their citizens.

Cities featured in the report

Solna
Stockholm
Espoo
Helsinki

Glasgow

Riga

Birmingham

Malmo

Rotterdam
Utrecht
Antwerp
Ghent
Dusseldorf
Brussels

Warsaw

Leipzig

Katowice

Brno

Bratislava
Vienna

Nantes

Cluj-Napoca

Budapest

Milan
Turin

Ljubljana

Toulouse

Zagreb

Lisbon
Madrid
Barcelona

Naples

3. Introduction

The latest Eurobarometer on mental health, published in October 2023, offers a comprehensive overview of the increasing mental health challenges across Europe. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health problems affected around 84 million people in the EU (one in six individuals), at an economic cost exceeding €600 billion or more than 4% of GDP,[1] with significant regional, social, gender and age inequalities.

After recent events, from the pandemic to Russia's war in Ukraine, and ongoing social, environmental and economic pressures, the situation has only deteriorated. Nearly half (46%) of people in the EU reported experiencing emotional or psychosocial issues, such as depression or anxiety, within the past twelve months. Young people across many European countries have been especially affected; in several countries, the rates of depression symptoms among youth were nearly double those of the general population. Over half (54%) of those affected did not seek professional help, highlighting the urgent need for continued efforts on mental health at the EU level.

Mental health is an integral aspect of overall health. It is not only a precondition for individual wellbeing; it is a critical public health concern with profound economic and social implications that impact every aspect of the economy and society and go beyond individual and family issues. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 90% of health inequalities can be explained by financial insecurity, social exclusion, lack of a decent job and poor working conditions as well as poor quality housing.[2] This has been confirmed by the majority of respondents (60%) in the Eurobarometer survey, who identified socioeconomic conditions as the most important factor influencing their mental health, followed by financial security (53%). Around a third of Europeans also cited contact with nature and green spaces (35%), sleep habits (35%), physical activity (34%) and social connections (33%) as key contributors to mental wellbeing.
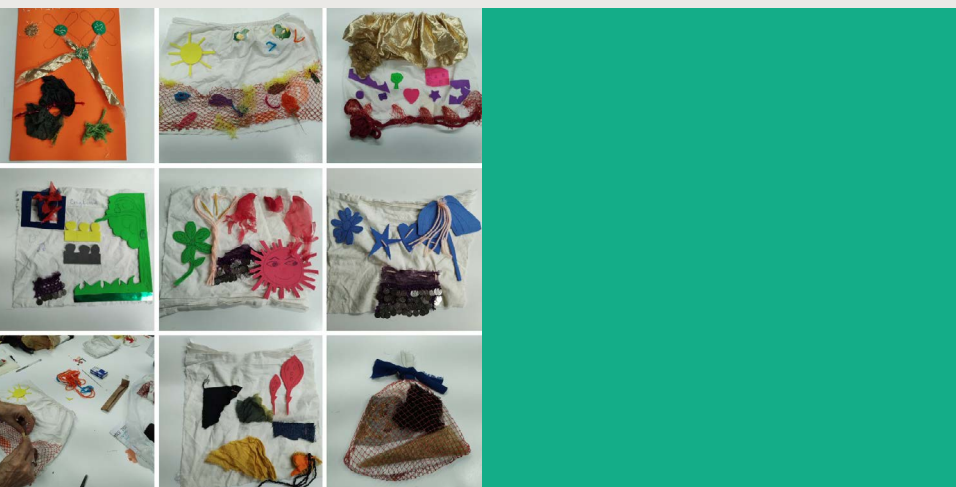
[1] Fiorillo, A., & Gorwood, P. (2020). The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and implications for clinical practice. *European Psychiatry*, *63*(1), E32. https://doi.org/10.1192/j.eurpsy.2020.35

[2] WHO. (2019a). *Healthy, Prosperous Lives for All: the European Health Equity Status Report Executive Summary*. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/346044/WHO-EURO-2019-3536-43295-60680-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

4. EU policies on mental health

Recognising the growing importance of mental health, the EU has been taking steps to create frameworks that promote accessible, high-quality care across Member States. Under its principle 16, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan affirms the right to accessible and affordable high-quality healthcare treatment. The European Long-term care strategy (2022) calls on Member States to ensure access to timely, comprehensive and affordable care services (home, residential and community-based) for those in need. To further prioritise mental health across EU policies and initiatives, the European Commission's Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health (2023) establishes a fundamental framework to guide Member States and stakeholders in tackling mental health challenges. The framework emphasises the need to identify high-risk population groups across the EU and target support, resources and tailored policies to meet their specific needs.

While the EC's Communication prioritises Member States as key stakeholders for the development and implementation of mental health policies, it is important to recognise that these policies cannot be successfully implemented without strong action at the local level. Although the national governments hold the primary responsibility, effective mental health strategies require addressing the complex material, social and environmental factors that influence the overall mental wellbeing of individuals —many of which fall outside traditional public health policies.

Local, universal wellbeing initiatives based around key competencies and functions of local governments and cities have proven to have a positive impact on citizens' wellbeing.[3] Cities are best positioned to design and implement integrated, place-based interventions, and are essential in translating European-level commitments on mental health into concrete realities. This also aligns with the WHO's approach which states that all policy areas, not just clinical care, are crucial in addressing health issues. Mental health policies and measures need to address the broader aspects of people's lives that create the conditions of wellbeing.[4]

5. Methodology

The data for this report was collected between 2023 and 2024 using a variety of qualitative methods, including interviews, case studies, the collection of good practices from ongoing projects, workshops and field visits, covering 32 cities from 19 countries across Europe.[5] Eurocities also conducted a survey to assess the measures cities have implemented to address mental health and wellbeing. A total of 27 cities responded, offering a diverse range of approaches and local initiatives. Responses were submitted by city authorities and relevant administrative departments, which being closest to citizens, have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of target populations and the support available.

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[3] New Economics Foundation. (2010). *The role of local government in promoting wellbeing: Healthy Communities Programme.* https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/bb8366694aa033e578_vvm6bfv3t.pdf

[4] WHO. (2010). *A conceptual framework for action on the social determinants of health.* https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44489

[5] Cities covered: Antwerp, Barcelona, Birmingham, Bratislava, Brno, Brussels, Budapest, Cluj-Napoca, Dusseldorf, Espoo, Ghent, Glasgow, Helsinki, Katowice, Ljubljana, Lisbon, Leipzig, Madrid, Malmo, Milan, Nantes, Naples, Riga, Rotterdam, Solna, Stockholm, Toulouse, Turin, Utrecht, Zagreb, Vienna, Warsaw.

6. Integrating mental health into city policies

Over 70% of Europeans live in cities, and this percentage will increase in the coming decades. According to a Eurostat survey, mental health disorders are a growing problem in urban areas, with rising rates of depression, anxiety and suicide, and are among the leading causes of death among women and young people aged 15-25.[6] In the city of Ghent, for example, 10.9% of residents report using antidepressants, while in Madrid, 28.1% of the population aged 15-64 was at risk of poor mental health in 2021. The city also saw a significant increase in the prevalence of people suffering from depression (9.3%), anxiety (8.7%) and loneliness (13.7%).

Many analyses indicate that city living has a mixed impact on a person's wellbeing and mental health.

On the one hand, higher mental illness and dissatisfaction rates in cities result largely from the concentration of risk factors such as poverty, chronic stress, exposure to pollution and noise, crime, social exclusion and isolation. Individuals living in cities are 20% more likely to experience depression compared to those residing in rural areas. On the other hand, urban living can bring great benefits to mental health through better access to essential services like healthcare, education, socialisation and better employment opportunities.[8] And while city households tend to be smaller and more transient, which can increase isolation and feelings of depression, urban residents often enjoy larger, more diverse social networks thanks to the broader social opportunities that cities can provide.[9] Ultimately, cities present a contrasting set of challenges and opportunities that can both negatively impact and positively influence mental health.

All cities that have participated in the survey recognise that mental health cannot be addressed solely through healthcare policy. It requires implementation of complex measures that consider individual wellbeing, social and economic factors, environmental conditions, cultural influences and urban planning.

Multiple factors affecting mental health

Mental health is conditioned by genetic, personal and external factors. The distribution of social, economic and environmental resources and cultural factors, such as employment status, income and spatial inequalities, sense of belonging and support networks, and access to green and calm areas, all have a significant impact on mental health.[7]

[6] Eurostat. (n.d.). *European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) microdata*. European Commission.
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-health-interview-survey

[7] Friedli, L., & WHO. (2009). *Mental health, resilience and inequalities* / by Lynne Friedli. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.
https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/107925

[8] Van der Bergh, R. (2020, February 4). *How city living could be making you anxious – and how to deal with it*. World Economic Forum.
https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/02/cities-urban-life-mental-health/

[9] Mechelli, A. (2018, October 17). *Cities increase your risk of depression, anxiety and psychosis, but bring mental health benefits too*. King's College London.
https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cities-increase-your-risk-of-depression-anxiety-and-psychosis-but-bring-mental-health-benefits-too

Social conditions and inequalities

The link between mental health and the social conditions in which people live is well-established.[10] Individuals experiencing material hardship, such as poverty, unemployment, poor working conditions and inadequate housing, are at a heightened risk of developing mental illness. Poverty and unemployment, in particular, have a direct and negative impact on mental health. There is a clear correlation between unhappiness and unemployment, as financial insecurity and lack of purpose contribute to stress, anxiety and depression.[11] Similarly, poor housing conditions, especially those lacking supportive social infrastructure, not only increase mental health risks but also place an additional burden on healthcare systems. Evidence suggests that improving housing quality can reduce hospitalisations and optimise care expenditure, particularly for vulnerable populations like older adults.[12]

Certain urban population groups are vulnerable to mental health issues, including young people, women, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, seniors, homeless individuals, and those with low incomes. Our research demonstrates that cities increasingly recognise the need for integrated, cross-sectoral interventions that combine social, welfare and health services to better prevent mental health disorders and enhance the quality and accessibility of care. By incorporating mental health considerations into local policies, covering areas like housing, childcare, employment and social services, city administrations can strategically address key social determinants of mental health, such as poverty, housing instability, unemployment and social isolation.

Helsinki focuses on developing service chains and multi-level collaboration in mental health services, especially for children and youth. The city provides low-threshold care, making it easy to access mental health support without referrals, ensuring early intervention. Services are free, confidential and designed to provide holistic care, encompassing physical, psychological and social wellbeing. Helsinki's service chains ensure coordination between healthcare providers, social services and schools, offering seamless support at every stage. This collaborative approach addresses the mental health needs of children and youth while reducing barriers to care and helping foster long-term mental wellbeing.

Warsaw has noted significant arrivals of migrants from Ukraine, who may account for as much as 15% of the city's population. The majority of these migrants are women and children who have often undergone traumatic experiences. To support them, the city offers comprehensive assistance, including access to education through schools and kindergartens, medical and psychiatric care (including specialised traumatology), and employment opportunities along with additional benefits.

Stockholm applies individual placement and support (IPS) methods to facilitate the employment of people with long-term mental health problems, offering a job coach to accompany individuals through the processes. These coaches provide ongoing, tailored support, which is critical to helping individuals succeed in the competitive job market. Through this employment scheme, Stockholm has successfully integrated hundreds of individuals with mental health challenges into the workforce, demonstrating the effectiveness of the IPS model.

[10] *New Economics Foundation. (2010). The role of local government in promoting wellbeing: Healthy Communities Programme.*

[11] Clark, A. E., & Oswald, A. J. (1994). Unhappiness and Unemployment. *Economic Journal*, 104(424), 648-659.

[12] Melianova, E., Morris, T. T., Leckie, G., & Manley, D. (2024). Local government spending and mental health: Untangling the impacts using a dynamic modelling approach. *Social Science & Medicine*, *349*, 115158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.115158

Toulouse works with young homeless people with several mental health and addiction problems through its adaptation of the 'housing first' programme. The goal was to provide housing to reduce the likelihood of these young adults ending up on the streets or to quickly house those who were already homeless. Besides offering direct access to independent housing, a medical-social team of professionals provides individual support to each person, covering access to health and wellbeing, training and access to employment, social inclusion, and development of personal competencies to deal with everyday life. The team offers recovery-oriented support in mental health. Support is available through a phone service after office hours and during the weekend.

Birmingham supports a project led by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) 'The Delicate Mind' that works with Muslim communities, both in religious settings and in the wider community, to address mental health. The project connects individuals to services, including a qualified Muslim counsellor, and facilitates open discussions through community-led sessions, webinars and in-reach activities in religious spaces. These efforts raise awareness of mental health issues and promote understanding of the stigma around mental health issues within the community.

The broader wellbeing of local populations is tied to social connections, support networks and a strong sense of belonging; key elements that form the social fabric of communities. Cities are developing social inclusion programmes that target marginalised groups, such as seniors, refugees and people with disabilities, providing opportunities for them to participate in community activities and initiatives that help to bring people together and foster social interactions. Strengthening these aspects through interventions in place-based settings such as schools, workplaces and sports clubs have shown a very positive impact.[13]

Urban design and transport

The design and functionality of urban spaces, including streets, public areas, architecture and transportation systems, have a big impact on the mental health and wellbeing of city residents. The prevalence of noise and air pollution in urban areas, stemming from traffic, construction and other sources, has been linked to sleep disruptions, increased stress and higher levels of anxiety. By addressing these stressors through thoughtful urban design, cities can significantly improve the mental health and wellbeing of their inhabitants.[14]

The Hospital Open Spaces project implemented by the city of **Ljubljana** aims to transform the outdoor areas surrounding the University Medical Center and the Oncology Institute to enhance the wellbeing of patients and healthcare professionals. These areas, designed to promote relaxation and reduce stress, incorporate green spaces and social areas to encourage interaction with nature and support recovery. The initiative highlights the importance of user-centred design in healthcare environments, addressing both functional and emotional wellbeing.

[13] Baker, S. (2022). *A scoping review of place-based approaches to community engagement and support*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 43/2022. https://gov.wales/place-based-approaches-community-engagement-and-support

[14] WHO. (2016). *Global report on urban health: Equitable healthier cities for sustainable development*. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241565271

Elements such as street layout, mixed land use and the presence of active public spaces serve as hubs for social interaction, fostering relationships that are essential for mental health. High-quality pedestrian paths and well-maintained urban soundscapes can help reduce stress. Activities like walking and cycling are linked to reduced stress levels and improved mood. In addition, walking offers a low-carbon travel option that supports environmental sustainability.[15]

The Green Connection project in **Rotterdam** focuses on connecting local communities to green spaces through accessible walking routes. The project works closely with residents to create maps outlining walking loops, which include various activities and green areas that encourage people to engage with nature. The initiative aims to promote physical activity and wellbeing by providing easy access to these spaces. The city also works with general practitioners, integrating them into the planning to encourage residents to participate in outdoor activities as part of maintaining their mental and physical health.

Glasgow uses the Place Standard Tool, developed in collaboration with Public Health Scotland, the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council, to inform local planning and regeneration projects. This tool facilitates structured discussions about the physical and social aspects of a place, helping communities evaluate how well the area where they live meets their needs. The assessment covers a broad range of interventions, including transportation, natural spaces, housing and community engagement, allowing residents to identify strengths and areas for improvement in their neighbourhoods. The Place Standard Tool has been applied in various neighbourhoods across Glasgow, engaging residents, organisations and policymakers to collaboratively plan for better spaces.

Access to safe and reliable urban transport systems is another critical factor. The dominance of cars in many cities not only contributes to air and noise pollution but also reduces opportunities for social interaction in public spaces. A well-designed, accessible urban mobility system enhances a sense of security, independence and personal freedom, particularly for vulnerable populations, including the elderly, women and low-income households. For instance, age-friendly transport policies, such as free bus passes for seniors, have been shown to increase public transport use and reduce feelings of loneliness and depression among older adults.[16] Providing equitable access to transportation ensures that all residents, regardless of age or socioeconomic status, can easily access essential services, job opportunities, education and recreational activities.[17]

[15] Montgomery, C. (2013). *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

[16] Reinhard, E., Courtin, E., van Lenthe, F. J., & Avendano, M. (2018). Public transport policy, social engagement and mental health in older age: A quasi-experimental evaluation of free bus passes in England. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. doi: 10.1136/jech-2017-210038

[17] Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). (2009). *Future health: Sustainable places for health and well-being*. London: CABE.

Natural urban environments

Urban areas are often marked by stress-inducing factors such as ambient noise, light and air pollution, and overcrowding, all of which contribute to rising mental health challenges and unhappiness in cities. Common urban noise sources, like traffic, sirens, construction and even social activity, are linked to higher stress levels.[18] In response to these urban stressors, green spaces (parks, urban forests, community gardens, green roofs and street trees) and blue spaces (coastlines, rivers and lakes) not only help to mitigate pollution and environmental degradation but are also increasingly recognised as restorative environments.[19]

Numerous studies show that exposure to safe and welcoming urban natural environments reduces stress, improves mood [20] and enhances overall wellbeing.[21] Designing cities with accessible green spaces is particularly vital for vulnerable groups, such as children, adolescents, the elderly and those living in poverty.[22]

Beyond individual benefits, natural environments can also strengthen social cohesion. In **Berlin** and **London**, urban green spaces have been shown to foster social inclusion, particularly for disadvantaged groups like migrants and asylum seekers. These green areas serve as community hubs where individuals can interact, build social connections and integrate into the local community, helping to reduce isolation and promote social wellbeing.[23] Smaller, well-maintained local parks and community gardens, especially within a five-minute walk of homes, also provide benefits by being more accessible and regularly used by residents.[24]
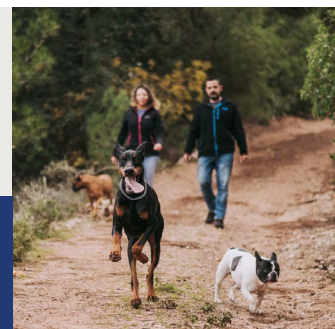
In 2019, the Olari Health Nature Trail was opened in **Espoo**'s Central Park, offering a 2.4 km path designed to promote the health benefits of nature. It features eight checkpoints, each with exercises aimed at children, visitors unfamiliar with forests, and those seeking nature's health benefits. The trail's development was a collaborative effort, involving local associations, schools, mental health organisations and volunteers. It provides an opportunity for visitors to engage with nature, relax and enjoy the multiple benefits it offers for mental and physical wellbeing.

The Therapeutic Garden in **Zagreb** offers a nature-based solution to enhance mental health, particularly for people with disabilities. The garden provides a tranquil space for social interaction, relaxation and gardening, helping reduce stress and improve wellbeing. Its multi-sensory park stimulates all senses, offering therapeutic benefits. Workshops led by therapists and gardening experts support vulnerable groups, fostering a community where people can connect, reduce isolation and engage in restorative activities. The garden's inclusive environment promotes mental health through nature-based therapy.

[18] WHO (2024). *Disability weights for noise-related health states in the WHO European Region*. WHO Regional Office for Europe. https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/portal/resource/en/who-376870

[19] European Environment Agency. (2021). *Who benefits from nature in cities? Social inequalities in access to urban green and blue spaces across Europe*. https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/who-benefits-from-nature-in

[20] Francis, J., Giles-Corti, B., Wood, L., & Knuiman, M. (2012). Creating a sense of community: The role of public space. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 32(4), 401-409. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2012.07.002

[21] Kaplan, R. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 15(3), 169-182. https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-4944(95)90001-2

[22] Vanaken, G. J., & Danckaerts, M. (2018). Impact of green space exposure on children's and adolescents' mental health: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(12), 2668. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15122668

[23] Rishbeth, C., Blachnicka-Ciacek, D., & Darling, J. (2019). Participation and wellbeing in urban greenspace: 'Curating sociability' for refugees and asylum seekers. *Geoforum*, 106, 125-134. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.07.014

[24] Morris, E. A. (2019). Do cities or suburbs offer higher quality of life? Intrametropolitan location, activity patterns, access, and subjective well-being. *Cities*, 89, 228-242. doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.02.012
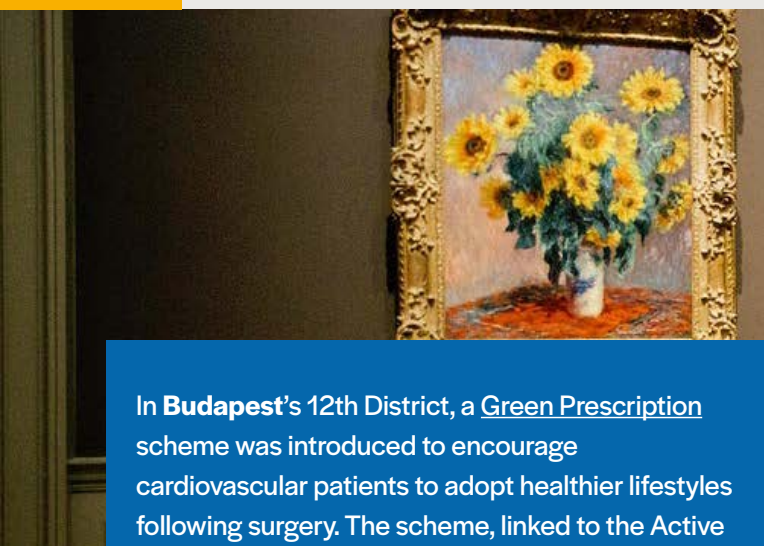
In **Budapest**'s 12th District, a Green Prescription scheme was introduced to encourage cardiovascular patients to adopt healthier lifestyles following surgery. The scheme, linked to the Active Hegyvidék Programme, provides written advice from doctors, encouraging patients to engage in outdoor physical activities rather than relying solely on medication. Patients can participate in free activities such as running, hiking or stretching in local parks, tailored to their needs for stress reduction, mental development or cardiovascular health. The initiative also connects with other local programmes, like guided walks for rehabilitation and activities for the elderly.

As urbanisation continues to rise, integrating green spaces into city planning will be critical to ensuring the mental health and resilience of urban populations. In this context, cities are increasingly adopting the **One Health** approach, which highlights the interconnectedness of human, animal and environmental health. It emphasises that these areas cannot be managed separately, particularly as urban ecosystems face challenges like increased travel, new diseases and environmental shifts.[25] This approach, which became even more important after the COVID-19 pandemic, encourages collaboration across various fields, such as human health, veterinary medicine and environmental science, to tackle the complex health challenges cities face today. The One Health 4 Cities network brings together cities like **Lyon, Strasbourg Metropole** and **Munich** to integrate One Health into local policies. These initiatives include green prescribing, healthy urban planning and biodiversity efforts, while recognising mental wellbeing as a key part of the urban environment.

Culture and arts

Involvement in arts and cultural activities is associated with improved life satisfaction, reduced anxiety and lower rates of depression. Whether as a passive participant, such as attending concerts or viewing arts, or as an active creator, cultural engagement offers substantial mental health benefits for individuals.[26] Cultural activities include a wide range of interventions such as music, drama, dance, visual arts, photography, film, reading and visiting museums and galleries. These activities offer cognitive stimulation, physical exercise and stress relief, contributing to better mental health. For instance, group music therapy has been shown to alleviate loneliness and provide emotional support for cancer patients.[27]

The **Eurocities Lille Call to Action on Sustainable Culture**, launched in 2023 and signed by 51 mayors across Europe, is a political commitment to create cultural policies focused on sustainability and inclusive society. Acknowledging the essential role of culture in shaping resilient cities, one of the priorities includes **Creative Climate Action** as a means to improve health and wellbeing. By committing to this call, cities pledge to empower artists and designers as agents of change, using cultural activities to support mental health, build confidence, strengthen community resilience and foster a sense of wellbeing for people.

[25] WHO. (2023). *Local-level policy recommendations: operationalizing a One Health approach. Political statement of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network.* WHO Regional Office for Europe. Retrieved from https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/366322/WHO-EURO-2023-7060-46826-68259-eng.pdf?sequence=1

[26] Culture Action Europe. (2023). *Culture's contribution to health and well-being: A report on evidence and policy recommendations for Europe.* Culture Action Europe. https://cultureactioneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Final_C4H_FullReport_small.pdf

[27] Daykin, N., McClean, S., & Bunt, L. (2007). Creativity, identity and healing: Participants' accounts of music therapy in cancer care. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, 11(3), 349-370. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459307077548

The Overcoming Burnout through Arts project led by **Cluj-Napoca** was a pilot initiative designed to reduce burnout symptoms through artistic interventions. The programme involved creative workshops developed in collaboration with health experts and artists. These workshops focus on practical artistic activities, such as music, crafts and drawing, which help participants manage stress and strong emotions, enhance emotional intelligence and cultivate self-expression. It showed promising results, as after seven weeks participants experienced a significant reduction in burnout levels and reported increased wellbeing and positive experiences.

Brussels has been piloting an innovative programme called Museums on Prescription, where doctors can prescribe free cultural visits to patients as part of their treatment for mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression and stress. This non-medical approach is designed to complement traditional treatments like therapy and medication by immersing patients in art and culture. Patients are prescribed up to five visits, and these cultural experiences aim to provide a therapeutic tool that alleviates mental health issues. The initiative not only supports emotional healing but also promotes broader public engagement with museums, encouraging the idea that cultural spaces are accessible to all.

Cities enhance these benefits by investing in cultural infrastructure, promoting arts initiatives and making cultural events more accessible to residents. Cultural institutions such as libraries, museums and galleries serve as community hubs, offering spaces for social connection and cohesion. Libraries, in particular, are recognised as safe spaces for social inclusion, especially for vulnerable populations like the unemployed, homeless and those undergoing rehabilitation.[28] Cities often collaborate with local cultural actors to integrate arts into public health and social care services, creating inclusive spaces that foster social cohesion and improve community wellbeing.

Incorporating cultural activities into municipal health policies offers cities a complementary strategy to health prevention and treatment beyond traditional medical approaches.[29] For example, creative arts programmes have been successfully employed to support mental health recovery, reduce loneliness and enhance overall wellbeing.[30] Recognising the cross-sectoral impact of culture on health, cities understand the importance of creating synergies between cultural initiatives and other local policies in education, social services and urban development. This holistic, city-level approach aligns with the World Health Organization's recommendation to integrate arts into health and public policy.[31]


Katowice has been operating a therapy studio and rehabilitation centre for people who require psychological assistance since 2006. This includes counselling, physical therapy and tailored mental health interventions aimed at improving quality of life for those with mental and emotional challenges. The city collaborates with healthcare professionals to ensure that patients receive both physical and mental care, aligning with modern strategies to address complex mental health issues among urban populations.

28 Fahy, K., et al. (2023). Mental health impact of cuts to local government spending on cultural, environmental and planning services in England: A longitudinal ecological study. *BMC Public Health*, *23*, 1564. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-16340-0

29 Culture Action Europe. (2023). *Culture's contribution to health and well-being*.

30 Forouzandeh, S., et al. (2020). Creative arts and their role in enhancing mental health recovery and reducing loneliness. *American Psychiatric Association* (APA). Retrieved from https://www.psychiatry.org.

31 WHO. (2019b). *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*. WHO Regional Office for Europe. https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289054553
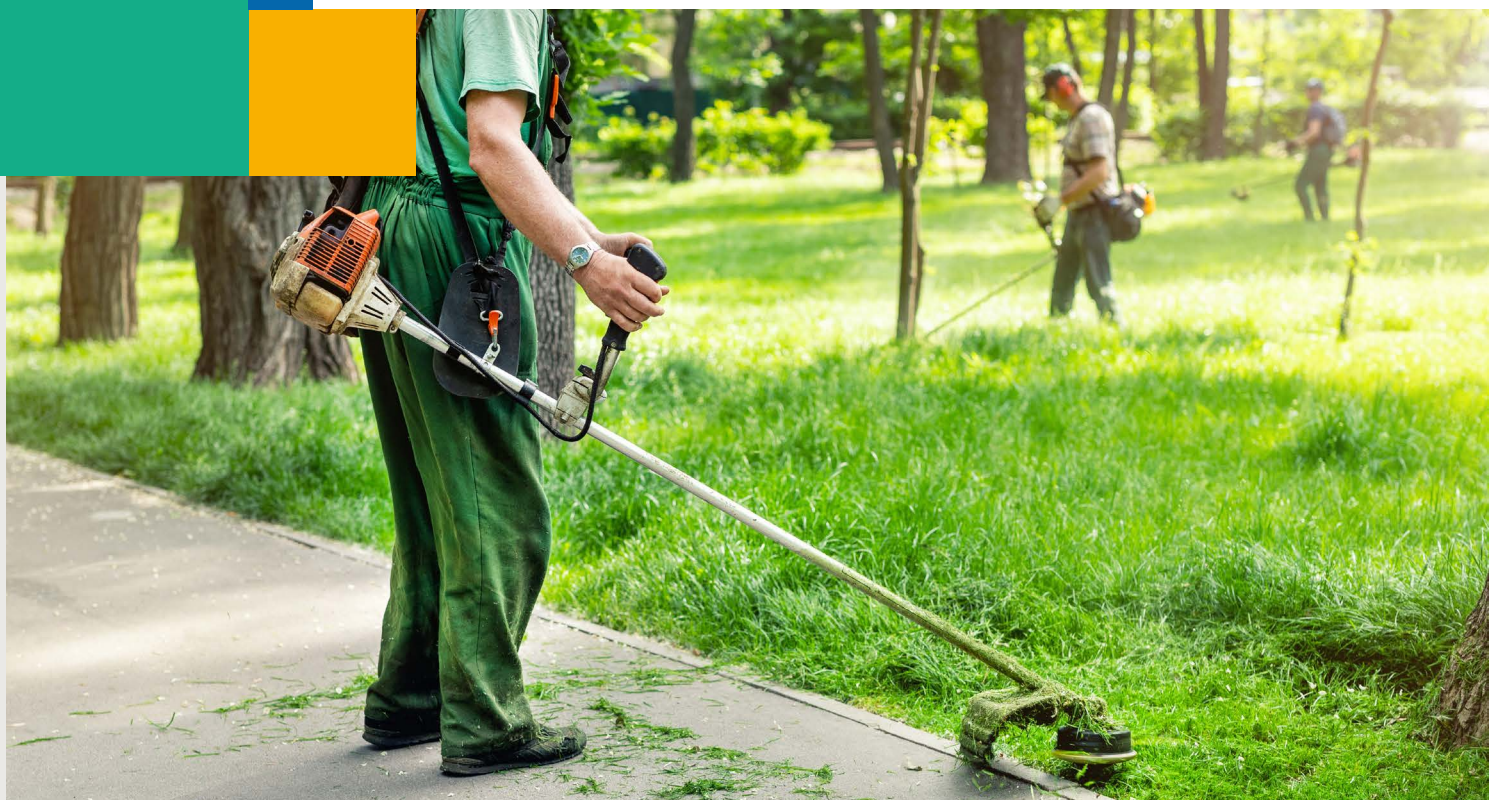
Cities as local employers and buyers

Local authorities, as major employers and buyers, play a critical role in shaping mental health outcomes for both their employees and the broader local economy. With many city employees and contractors being residents, cities have a unique opportunity to influence workplace mental wellbeing through human resources and procurement policies. This responsibility extends to promoting good working conditions, mental health support and overall wellbeing.

Cities across the EU often lead by example in fostering positive organisational cultures and adopting leadership practices that prioritise mental health. They develop mental health and wellbeing programmes, prevention strategies and early intervention schemes to address factors that negatively affect mental health in the workplace. The cities of Helsinki and London have implemented workplace mental health initiatives aimed at promoting mental health among city employees. **Barcelona** has a detailed Mental Health Plan that includes internal guidelines for city employees. The 'Barcelona Agreement to look after mental health at work' is a key initiative within this plan, offering specific commitments to improve mental health conditions in the workplace.

Local authorities are also significant buyers within their communities. By integrating social criteria into procurement policies and prioritising contractors that maintain high standards of employee wellbeing, cities can positively influence the broader local economy. These procurement practices allow cities to promote healthier work environments, encouraging fair wages, job security and safe working conditions.

Malmo has developed and integrated social and environmental criteria into its procurement processes, ensuring that suppliers meet high standards for working conditions, including job security and fair wages. This approach extends to auditing working conditions among suppliers to ensure compliance with these standards. In addition to promoting safe environments, Malmo's procurement strategies also encourage sustainable development, aiming to create a fairer, healthier workplace. The city's recognition through awards like the European Commission's Fair and Ethical Trade City Award highlights Malmo's commitment to fostering a socially responsible and mentally healthy work environment through its purchasing power.

7. Cities' challenges in delivering mental health services

Cities across Europe face a multitude of challenges when it comes to providing accessible and targeted mental health services to their residents. Key issues include governance complexities, financial constraints, service integration difficulties, workforce shortages and the stigma surrounding mental health. The following examples illustrate how cities are addressing these obstacles while seeking to improve mental health support for all residents, especially those who are hardest to reach.

Fragmented competencies

The role of cities in relation to mental health is defined by national legal frameworks, with responsibilities and funding shared across different levels of government. Cities participating in the survey indicated that mental health is primarily a national competency. However, many of the factors influencing mental health, such as social policy, employment,

environmental issues and urban design, fall within the remit of local authorities. As a result, cities view mental health as a priority and take proactive steps to provide services to vulnerable communities.

For example, **Madrid** City Council's competencies are limited to prevention and health promotion under the national mental health promotion programme. Similarly, while **Vienna** addresses several mental health issues through its city measures, decisions regarding the funding of services through the national health insurance system are determined at the national level. **Malmo** has taken a collaborative approach by developing a local action plan for mental health and suicide prevention. This initiative, established in 2023, was created in partnership with the Swedish government and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, demonstrating the crucial role of collaboration between local and national authorities in shaping mental health strategies.

The interventions on mental health by the city of **Riga** are closely tied to Latvia's National Public Health Strategy (2021-2027), which emphasises mental health as a key aspect of public health, focusing on both prevention and early interventions. Riga City Council integrates mental health promotion into its broader social and health services, ensuring that the related care is accessible to vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and low-income populations. Riga also launched a mental health check-up point for youth, which is part of the city's broader efforts to align with national objectives of early detection and support for mental health issues included in the national strategy.

Low recognition and stigma of mental health problems

Antwerp, Bratislava, Lisbon, Milan, Nantes, Rotterdam, Stockholm and **Vienna** reported that stigma and discrimination remain major barriers that prevent individuals with mental health needs from accessing care. Many people are still reluctant to seek help for mental health problems, either due to a lack of understanding of mental illness or fear of being stigmatised. **Ghent** stressed the need for additional capacities to improve outreach, cultural sensitivity, and prevention efforts, which are key to facilitating smoother transitions into mental health care. **Katowice** recommended providing free psychological support, early diagnosis, and targeted support for children and youth to address these issues at an earlier stage.
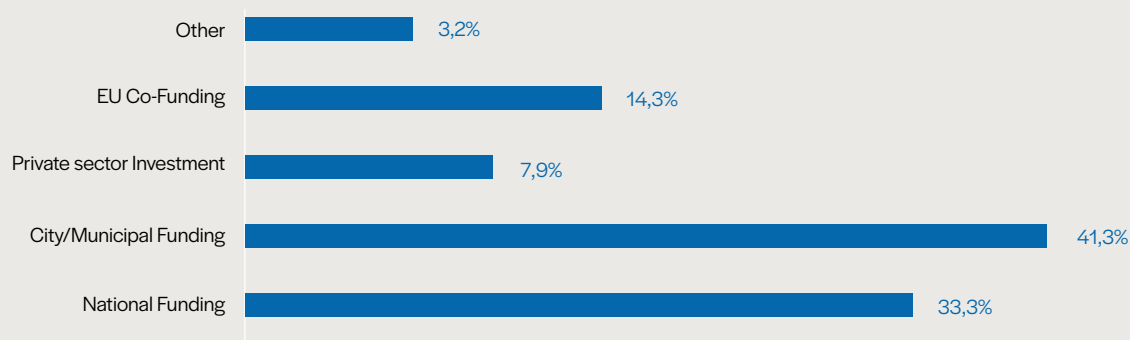
Insufficient financial resources

Despite growing recognition of the importance of mental health, the majority of cities contributing to the Eurocities survey lack the necessary resources and infrastructure to provide adequate mental health services to their residents. Underfunded mental health services limit the development and implementation of innovative programmes and services. Based on collected data, most cities finance their initiatives related to mental health through a combination of local budgets and national funding.

Most of the resources in **Barcelona, Dusseldorf, Ghent, Glasgow, Helsinki, Leipzig, Malmo, Nantes, Rotterdam, Toulouse** and **Vienna** come from municipal and national funding, while **Brno, Cluj-Napoca, Lisbon, Milan, Riga** and **Warsaw** also tap into EU funds (Horizon Europe, ESF+, Creative Europe) or private sector investments. The city of **Madrid** also experiments with sponsorship funds from large companies (Foro de Empresas) directly managed by the city council.

Figure 1:

How Mental Health Initiatives and Projects are Financed in Cities

Funding Source	Percentage
Other	3,2%
EU Co-Funding	14,3%
Private sector Investment	7,9%
City/Municipal Funding	41,3%
National Funding	33,3%

Besides using the EU funds, the city of **Brno** also supports broader mental health initiatives through financial subsidies aimed at healthcare programmes, including those addressing mental health. For example, in 2023, the city allocated over €210,000 to support various health programmes, with a portion going towards mental health services, domestic violence prevention, and support for informal caregivers. These financial subsidies aim to strengthen healthcare initiatives and ensure comprehensive support for vulnerable populations, promoting wellbeing across the city.

Lack of integration with other health care services

Mental health services are often siloed and not integrated with other healthcare services, such as primary care and physical health services. This fragmentation can lead to gaps in continuity of care for individuals with mental health issues, who are often required to navigate multiple systems and services to access the support they need. **Dusseldorf** addresses this issue by providing social psychiatric services for mentally ill homeless people who are unable to access other support systems. These services, offered in facilities like emergency shelters and day centres, enable early detection of mental illness and timely intervention. **Milan** promotes access channels to the system of prevention and care for families, individuals, students and young people.

Vienna bridges a lack of integration of services in the area of child and adolescent psychiatry through its additional care structure focusing on the treatment of children and young adults with mental illnesses. This initiative enables around 50 children and young people with mental illnesses to receive personalised care in their homes, ensuring that treatment is both accessible and tailored to individual needs. The service is an alternative to traditional inpatient care, which often has limited capacity. By offering home-based psychiatric care, families can remain in a supportive environment while receiving professional treatment. The city is expanding the limited national-level mental health infrastructure for young people by opening more psychiatric centres, aiming to bridge care gaps and reduce hospital admissions for complex mental health cases.

Shortage of human and expert capacities

Many cities report significant challenges in implementing mental health policies and services due to a lack of human and expert capacities at the municipal level. This includes a shortage of trained mental health professionals, social workers and experts in designing and coordinating mental health programmes. Cities often do not have sufficient staff to meet the growing demand for services, especially in response to complex urban challenges such as poverty, social isolation and economic inequality. In addition to staffing shortages, there is a gap in specialised expertise in critical areas like trauma, addiction, and suicide prevention, making it difficult for cities to address specific mental health crises effectively. To address critical gaps in expertise and capacity within municipal mental health services, cities are prioritising skill development and training for health and social care workers through targeted capacity-building programmes.

To bridge these gaps, cities often rely on partnerships with NGOs and private sector providers. Collaboration with community-based organisations has proven vital for reaching vulnerable groups that are often difficult to engage, such as homeless individuals, migrants, drug addicts and other marginalised populations.

These partnerships help extend the reach of mental health services, ensuring that support is available to those who may otherwise remain disconnected from formal health systems.

Riga has implemented the Team Reflection programme as part of the 'Mentality' project, which aims to transfer successful mental health practices across countries to support vulnerable groups. The programme's approach focuses on improving the psycho-emotional wellbeing of care professionals facing high stress and workloads by offering stress management tools and fostering peer support through a buddy system. Capacity-building activities and training materials were also developed and tailored for easy adaptation. Positive feedback from social care workers emphasised the programme's valuable supervisory support and stress management techniques, demonstrating its effectiveness in building a resilient mental health workforce.

In **Cluj-Napoca**, the city collaborates extensively with the NGO sector, particularly health and cultural organisations, to co-create and implement mental health initiatives. Collaboration with NGOs such as the Cluj Cultural Centre and PsyHealth enables the city to leverage the specialised knowledge, resources and personnel of these NGO partners and expand the scope of mental health initiatives without having to significantly increase its municipal workforce.
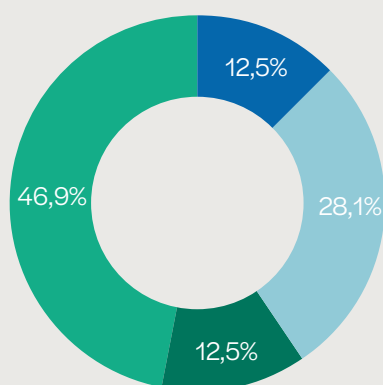
8. City-led approaches to mental health

Figure 2.

Does your city have a local mental health strategy and/or an action plan?

- 12,5%
- 28,1%
- 46,9%
- 12,5%

- ■ No
- ■ Integrated into municipal strategy
- ■ In process of developing
- ■ Yes

Given the complex factors affecting mental health, cities implement a range of targeted interventions to address different risk factors and population groups. Despite different city needs, resources and national contexts, cities across the EU have shown sustained commitment to addressing the mental health and wellbeing of their population on the political and programme level and have adopted several innovative strategies. Based on our findings, cities use numerous **policy measures** to address the mental health of their residents.

Local-level mental health strategies

Cities such as **Barcelona, Dusseldorf**, **Ghent, Katowice, Leipzig, Milan, Stockholm** and **Toulouse** have reported having mental health strategies or local action plans in place. **Warsaw** has recently approved the continuation of its mental health strategy for 2024-2030, aligned with the National mental health programme. Others, such as **Brno, Bratislava, Glasgow, Helsinki, Lisbon, Nantes** and **Solna**, have integrated mental health issues into their local municipal strategies. Even in cities without a standalone mental health strategy, the importance of mental health challenges is recognised, and funds are allocated to relevant initiatives aimed at supporting community wellbeing. This is the case for **Antwerp, Birmingham, Cluj-Napoca** and **Vienna,** many of which are currently working towards formalising their mental health strategies.

Ghent has developed a localised approach to mental health that emphasises both prevention and community-based support. The city's strategy includes efforts to address mental health as a cross-cutting issue, integrating psychological wellbeing into broader municipal policies such as housing, employment and social care. One of Ghent's key initiatives is the establishment of the Ghent Care Council, which brings together professionals, NGOs and citizens to consult on mental health issues and develop coordinated interventions. The city also emphasises the role of green spaces, parks and urban design in promoting mental wellbeing, recognising that access to nature can help reduce stress and anxiety. Ghent's mental health strategy is supported by a network of psychiatric hospitals and mobile community workers who provide tailored care in vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Barcelona launched a municipal strategy against loneliness (2020-2030) as part of its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. The city first measured the extent of the problem through surveys which revealed that 3.5% of the population often feels lonely, but this number rises to 7.3% when measured indirectly, highlighting hidden loneliness due to stigma. Interestingly, young people and those facing economic insecurity are the most affected. To address this, Barcelona established the Scientific Advisory Council against Loneliness and developed four strategic goals: raising awareness, providing resources, creating community spaces and adapting municipal operations to tackle loneliness. The city views loneliness as a collective societal issue, requiring communal action to address its impact on both mental and physical wellbeing.

Mainstreaming mental health in cities' policies and departments

The cities of **Dusseldorf, Lisbon, Nantes, Toulouse** and **Warsaw** have appointed coordinators, local councils and advisory boards to facilitate the mainstreaming of mental health considerations into relevant local policies. Meanwhile, **Barcelona, Brno, Glasgow** and **Turin** have adopted multiple tools, such as guidelines and integrated policy planning, to ensure a cohesive approach. This ensures that various city departments responsible for education, culture, employment, housing, transport, culture or environment policies reflect the needs of mental health and wellbeing. In **Milan** and **Rotterdam**, mental health initiatives are coordinated by a dedicated policy department. **Malmo** directly employs and provides training to individuals who have lived through mental health illnesses to ensure their perspectives are incorporated into city-wide initiatives.

Stockholm has taken a comprehensive approach to mainstreaming mental health across its city policies and departments. The coordination is achieved through a 'Mental health in all policies' approach, where mental health is seen as a cross-cutting issue that influences and is influenced by other sectors, such as housing, employment and transport. This allows the city to address social determinants of mental health, such as economic inequality and access to services, as part of its holistic strategy. These efforts include integrating mental health into planning for green spaces and recreational areas, as access to nature and outdoor activities is seen as vital to improving residents' mental wellbeing.
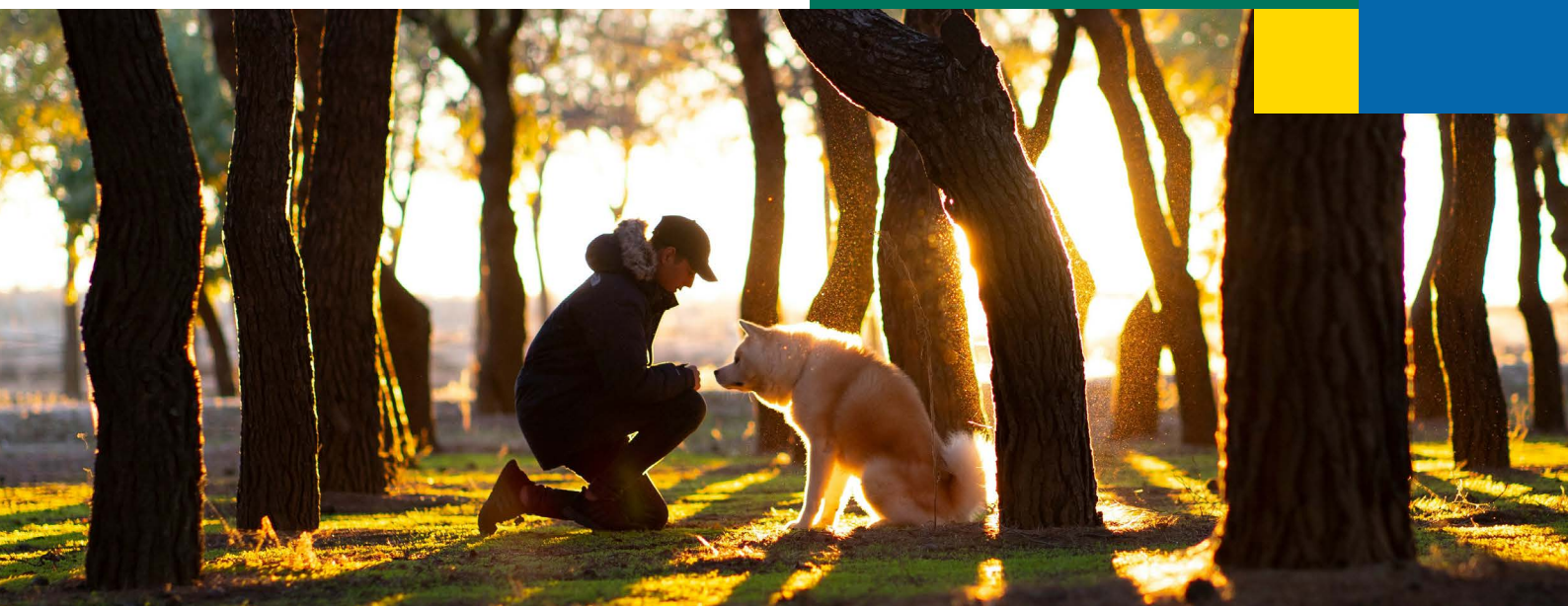
Dusseldorf's mental health strategy focuses on psychosomatic disorders and preventive care. A key element of Dusseldorf's approach is integrating mental health services with broader healthcare services. The Clinical Institute of Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy plays a central role in integrating mental health interventions into broader healthcare services. In addition to direct healthcare services, Dusseldorf works towards addressing the stigma surrounding mental health and promotes the importance of early intervention and comprehensive treatment. The city's strategy aims to make mental health care more accessible and improve quality of life for residents by embedding mental health services into various sectors of healthcare services and community support.

Political commitment

Placing mental health and wellbeing at the forefront of the political agenda enables the cities of **Barcelona, Ghent, Glasgow, Leipzig, Lisbon, Milan** and **Stockholm** to take more comprehensive and coordinated approaches to addressing mental health challenges. Political prioritisation of mental health often leads to increased funding for mental health services and sends a strong signal to the public that mental health is a critical issue that deserves attention and resources. In **Milan**, the city's political commitment is evident through its systematic collection of data on mental health and the measurement of mental wellbeing. This allows Milan to track the prevalence and impact of mental health in communities, enabling informed decision-making and targeted interventions.

In **Nantes**, mental health has been placed high on the political agenda through the creation of a comprehensive Mental Health Guide, launched by the city in 2023. This guide focuses on providing accessible mental health resources, addressing public mental health needs, and combatting the stigma around mental illness. It outlines services available for individuals and families, promoting mental wellbeing through community support and education. Nantes also works with local organisations to strengthen its mental health policies and ensure support for residents facing psychological challenges.

Madrid has transformed its political commitment to mental health into concrete action through regular data collection, statistical analysis and monitoring of mental wellbeing. This approach allows the city to track the prevalence of mental health issues, identify trends and implement targeted interventions. The city gathers data through surveys and health assessments, focusing on key factors such as depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders. This data is used to develop specific programmes aimed at improving mental health across different population groups, with a special focus on young people and vulnerable populations.

Collaborating with other local actors

A lack of funding and human resources compels cities to partner with other organisations in the planning and implementation of their mental health and wellbeing programmes.

Milan has established the Milan Pact for Mental Health, a framework that governs the collaboration between cultural associations, experts, cooperatives and users. This pact enables the city to engage these groups in processes of consultation, co-design and co-management to improve mental health services. The initiative ensures that various stakeholders are involved in shaping mental health policies, creating a more inclusive and responsive system. This coordinated effort helps Milan to tailor its mental health interventions effectively while fostering community participation.

Helsinki and **Warsaw** use interactive and participatory methods to involve residents, businesses and other groups in planning and decision-making processes related to the design and delivery of public services. Similarly, **Nantes** uses its local mental health council as a platform for consultations and coordination with different stakeholders. **Madrid** applies an innovative health asset model which encourages communities to focus attention on people's health and wellbeing. The work is implemented through the municipal community health centres using public areas, workplaces or festivals to encourage community participation. **Vienna** ensures expert collaboration in the area of psychiatric and psychosomatic care through steering groups, focus groups with peers, and workshops. **Ghent** has diverse consultation structures in place, such as Ghent's Care Council (see above), to involve professional network partners, civil society and citizens in decision-making processes.

Antwerp offers accessible mental health services in collaboration with hospitals and service organisations, ensuring that support is available to citizens at low costs. These partnerships allow the city to provide a wide range of mental health services, including crisis intervention, counselling and long-term psychological care. Notably, Antwerp has programmes to reduce waiting times and make mental health support more immediate, addressing gaps in care and ensuring that vulnerable populations, including children, teenagers and the elderly, have access to these services. This coordinated approach helps the city tackle mental health challenges effectively while minimising financial barriers for its residents.

Raising public awareness

The majority of cities address stigma surrounding mental illness through public awareness campaigns and efforts to promote positive attitudes towards mental health, encouraging individuals to seek help when needed. Many cities also collaborate with local SMEs and employers to create mentally healthy workplaces through promoting work-life balance and wellbeing in the workplace or offering training for managers. **Toulouse** implements an outreach strategy on mental health targeting young people, helping more than 1,100 youths each year overcome isolation and stigma around mental health. **Vienna** runs low-threshold campaigns to raise awareness of mental health and promote support services focused on vulnerable groups. In **Malmo**, regular seminars for organisations and citizens foster dialogue about mental health and disability. Feedback from these events is used to improve the planning and implementation of subsequent city mental health initiatives.

Lisbon organises participatory forums that focus on the mental health needs of vulnerable groups, such as the homeless, LGBT+ people and migrants. These forums aim to promote inclusion, activism and decision-making within these communities, giving visibility to their unique psychosocial risks. The initiative encourages the active participation of these groups in shaping policies that impact their mental wellbeing, ensuring their needs are recognised and addressed within the city's mental health strategy.

Social innovation and new approaches

Social innovation provides a transformative approach to addressing mental health challenges. By leveraging new methods and partnerships, cities can develop targeted initiatives that address the unique stressors and mental health needs of residents. With new methods and partnerships, cities can make mental health support more accessible and encourage individuals to be more open to seeking help. To reduce waiting times for mental health services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of **Helsinki** has made mental health services more accessible through platforms and technological solutions. These include online counselling, mental health hotlines and mobile mental health units. The city of **Barcelona** established its first suicide prevention phone line and launched a WhatsApp service for young people, allowing them to seek help by messaging in a way that feels comfortable. Both services in Barcelona are operated by trained volunteers

Brno has established three mental health centres to prevent long-term psychiatric hospitalisation and enable the transition of some patients to sheltered housing or city apartments with external support. **Vienna** has ensured a fast response to address increased levels of depression and anxiety in its population due to the COVID-19 pandemic, by launching several innovative projects and policies, including hotlines, public campaigns and psychiatric care offered to children and youth. **Ghent** has implemented an innovative communal care project, deploying four mobile community workers to provide tailored support in four vulnerable neighbourhoods. These workers proactively seek out residents with mental health issues who remain under the radar of care. On average, 100 clients per year are supported. The positive impact of the initiative spills over to wider neighbourhoods and fosters inclusivity and resilience.

Madrid Salud, in collaboration with Complutense University, integrates art and culture into health services, providing accessible mental health support through creative engagement. Working with local NGOs, cultural institutions and social services, the project offers free programmes like museum visits and workshops to promote wellbeing and social inclusion. By embedding art-based activities in health centres, Madrid Salud ensures that vulnerable groups have safe spaces for self-expression, which helps strengthen community bonds and support mental health in innovative ways.

The city of **Naples** has experimented with innovative mental health practices through its health budget model, which is part of the broader healthcare system managed by the Campania region. Naples' approach integrates both health and social support systems to provide holistic care for individuals with mental health issues. This approach emphasises personalised therapeutic and rehabilitative plans (PTRI) and includes social dimensions such as housing, employment and social reintegration. By collaborating with health services and social cooperatives, the health budget model seeks to support mental health recovery and community reintegration, addressing some of the long-standing issues in the region.

Conclusion

The increasing mental health challenges across Europe call for innovative, integrated approaches that extend beyond traditional healthcare. This report has highlighted the critical role of cities in addressing these needs by linking mental health to urban policy areas like housing, social inclusion, culture, urban design and environmental sustainability. Through close community connections and diverse local partnerships, cities can design and implement place-based, cross-sectoral interventions that address not only symptoms but also the root causes of mental health issues, often tied to social, economic or environmental factors.
Urban environments create both challenges and opportunities for mental health. High population density, economic inequalities and environmental stressors contribute to mental health risks, but cities also offer pathways for social connection, cultural engagement and accessible health services.

Despite their potential, cities face significant barriers, from limited resources and fragmented governance to workforce shortages. Overcoming these barriers will require stronger partnerships and coordination between local, national and EU levels. Integrating mental health into the European Pillar of Social Rights, streamlined coordination, clarified competencies and increased funding will provide cities with the necessary tools and resources to deliver mental health support that is accessible and responsive to the specific needs of their residents.

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